

Franciscan Sisters of Our Lady of Perpetual Help History: 1901-to the Present

The mission of the Franciscan Sisters of Our Lady of Perpetual Help is to be a transforming presence in society through witnessing Gospel values. Faithful to our charism in the mission of the Church we strive to prophetically respond to the needs of contemporary society.

We are Franciscan women religious committed to a Gospel way of life. We are committed to announce peace and to promote justice. Discerning God's will within the Church, we dedicate our lives to witness the Gospel compassionately and joyfully.

One hundred twenty years ago, the Spirit manifested itself to three women of faith, prophetic vision, and courage – Sister Solana Leczna, Sister Ernestine Matz, and Sister Hilaria Matz. Responding to the needs of Polish immigrants, these three Sisters separated from the Joliet Franciscans to remain at St. Stanislaus Kostka in St. Louis, a parish consisting of 2300 parishioners with over 600 children in the school where the Sisters taught.

In the early twentieth century, the vision of the Sisters broadened beyond only Polish-speaking parishes to include staffing other schools in predominantly rural parishes in Missouri and Illinois. Over the years the ministry expanded to include schools in all parts of the country.

In the early 1940s the Sisters ministered in elementary and secondary schools in Louisiana and New Mexico, working with African American and Hispanic students, and teaching, counseling, and social work with the impoverished families at the Catholic Indian Center in Gallup, New Mexico. The initial apostolate of education was expanded in 1953 to include work in the health care ministry with the acquisition of hospitals in Green Springs, Ohio, and Humboldt, Tennessee.

In the early 1960's the Sister responded to an invitation from the Bishop of Thailand to teach English and provide religious instruction to children. The Sisters taught at the Star of the Sea School for Girls, the Congregation's first foreign mission in Phuket, Thailand, for seven years until the Vietnam war began.

In the late 1990's, escalating retirement needs and costs, and the expansion of the St Louis airport influenced major decisions for the Sisters. Bound by a common heart rather than a common place or work, and in the spirit of poverty for the sake of mission, the Sisters divested of the Motherhouse and property in Ferguson. Our retired Sisters needing assisted living or skilled nursing care were moved to Cardinal Carberry Senior Living Center in Shrewsbury. The congregation has served on the Cardinal Ritter Senior Services Board since its beginning.

Administrative offices were built in Kirkwood, Missouri, and the Sisters moved into apartments, convents, and homes, allowing the Sisters to both live and work among God's people. As a community of 72 women committed to serving the poor and to empowering others to live the gospel with hope and joy, the Sisters serve in 11 states in pastoral care, education, health care, youth ministry and social services. The Sisters chose as a congregation to focus on the care of creation, naming the effort, Franciscans for Earth. They are founders and sponsors of three collaborative ministries in the St. Louis area, the English Tutoring Project, the Intercommunity Ecological Council and Marian Middle School. They also support a native Franciscan congregation in Haiti. In all that they do they continue to be inspired and motivated by Mother Ernestine's words, "There is no place too far, no service too humble, and no person too lowly."